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ABSTRACT

Despite its high employment rate, the Near Northside Neighborhood of Fort Worth, Texas, has a median income more than 40% below the citywide level. In 1999, the Near Northside Partners' Council (NNPC) became one of five centers for the national Neighborhood Jobs Initiative Demonstration. After extensive planning, the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative started full operation in Fort Worth's Near Northside in 2000. The Initiative is using a place-based approach to addressing the intermingled issues of culture, work, and intergenerational poverty by relying heavily on a network of cooperating community organizations with different specialties, including the Tarrant County College. The Initiative's initial objective has been to bring the level of adult employment among the heavily Latino neighborhood's residents to the level of the surrounding region over a period of several years while simultaneously working to increase the wages and quality of neighborhood residents' employment. Other areas on which the Initiative is placing special emphasis include encouraging more women to enter training and employment, improving residents' English, meeting the need for workers with computer skills, and managing the evolving program in a manner permitting quick response to new opportunities. As of mid-2001, the Initiative's APEX

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(Achieving Program Excellence) program had served roughly 200 people (about 2% of the neighborhood's population). (MN)

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NJI THE NEIGHBORHOOD JOBS INITIATIVE

Structures of Opportunity

Developing the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative in Fort Worth, Texas

Tony Proscio

May 2002

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PREFACE

In this paper, author Tony Proscio introduces us to Rosario, a resident of Fort Worth's Near Northside neighborhood. Like many Near Northside residents, Rosario faced limited career opportunities and a lifetime of low wages due to inadequate education and insufficient formal job preparation. But due to the efforts of the Near Northside Partners Council's Neighborhood Jobs Initiative (NJI), the labor market prospects of Rosario and others who live in this heavily Latino neighborhood have improved dramatically. By depicting the human dimension of this neighborhood-focused employment effort, this paper captures how one NJI site brought about this transformation.

Launched by MDRC in 1997, the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative began with the selection of organizations in Fort Worth and four other cities — Chicago, Hartford, New York, and Washington, DC. NJI attempts to transform residents' employment prospects by improving their opportunities to get the education, training, and other supports they need to find and hold jobs.

Community-based organizations that are the core of NJI's place-based approach are uniquely well positioned to galvanize a neighborhood around a new employment agenda. Fort Worth's NJI experience illustrates especially well the role these groups can play in brokering and tailoring employment services to serve the needs of local people. Building on their strong and respectful relationships with community residents, the Near Northside Partners Council (NNPC) has not only designed an employment center where neighbors can acquire education and skills training during hours that suit their schedules; it has shown that people will avail themselves of these services, in great numbers, when a trusted community partner is at the helm of such an effort. In its capacity as a broker, NNPC has used its trust with local residents to form partnerships with other service providers to reach a previously underserved Latino community.

As Proscio adeptly shows, NNPC is seeking simultaneously to lower both the personal and the institutional barriers that keep people poor. On the personal side, many Near Northside residents had shelved their dreams of working in jobs that offered living wages and benefits prior to NNPC's NJI efforts to provide the role models and information they needed to get ahead. On the institutional side, NNPC has systematically begun to

break down the programmatic barriers that contribute to the low employment expectations common to so many poor communities: lack of knowledge of where the better job opportunities are and how to apply for them, a fragmented service delivery system that forces customers to navigate a maze of providers and supports, and inaccessible educational institutions that inadequately integrate employment outcomes into their educational missions.

The story told in this first-hand account of NNPC's early victories in helping residents achieve their potential and overcome institutional obstacles teaches us what it takes to improve the job prospects of low-income residents, and in the process, transform a neighborhood through employment.

Gordon Berlin
Senior Vice President

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The effort and cooperation of many people and organizations helped make this report possible, beginning with author Tony Proscio, who captured the energy and commitment of the Fort Worth, Texas, community whose story he so ably tells. I would like to acknowledge particularly the dedication of Abby Gamboa and the staff and board members of the Near Northside Partners Council (NNPC) to the goal of improving employment opportunities for residents of the Near Northside and to thank them for taking the time to talk with the author. Special thanks are due to the residents who generously shared their personal stories and their experiences at NNPC. Gratitude is also owed to the agencies and their staffs who partner with NNPC to provide employment services to Near Northside residents: the Fort Worth Independent Schools District, Tarrant County Work Advantage Board, and the Women's Center of Tarrant County. Their cooperation was indispensable.

The development of this report benefited greatly from the valuable comments offered by Julia Lopez, Andre Oliver, Tom Beech, Abby Gamboa, and David Lozano. At MDRC, Gordon Berlin, Craig Howard, James Riccio, Laura Nelson, and Donna Wharton-Fields also reviewed the report and provided helpful suggestions.

I am grateful to the Burnett Foundation for recommending Fort Worth as a place for the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative to consider in its site selection process and for supporting NNPC and MDRC throughout the initiative. Finally, this work would not have been possible without the commitment and generosity of the principal funders of the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative: The Rockefeller Foundation, the J. P. Morgan Chase Foundation, and the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Frieda Molina
Project Director, Neighborhood Jobs Initiative

Note on Sources

This report is the result of nearly two dozen interviews with participants in the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative in Fort Worth, Texas — including trainees and recent graduates of training programs, instructors, staff, funders, and leaders of some of the participating organizations. The research was guided in particular by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation and the Near Northside Partners Council. But any opinions or conclusions expressed in this report are entirely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of either organization or others who contributed information and analysis.

Of the many reports and memoranda consulted for this report, only one is published and widely available. But that is an especially helpful primer on the case for "saturation" employment efforts generally and on the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative in particular. Those who would like more information on either subject would do well to consult *The Neighborhood Jobs Initiative: An Early Report on the Vision and Challenges of Bringing an Employment Focus to a Community-Building Initiative,* by Frieda Molina and Laura C. Nelson (New York: MDRC, 2001).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Near Northside neighborhood of Fort Worth, Texas (population 13,000), is among the city's poorer enclaves, with a median income more than 40 percent below that of Fort Worth as a whole. Yet the neighborhood's employment rate is high, with many heads of households working two or even three low-wage jobs a day. In short, the antipoverty challenge in the Near Northside isn't mainly a matter of encouraging residents to work. It's a matter of helping them raise their skills, and their access to job opportunities, above the level of unstable, subsistence work with few or no benefits.

The great majority of Near Northside residents are immigrants from Mexico or first-generation Mexican-Americans, with a growing minority from other parts of Latin America. As a result, many residents speak little or no English, and literacy levels, even in Spanish, are below average. This has one important consequence: Even though the neighborhood is close to the geographic heart of Fort Worth, residents are in many respects isolated from the employment economy around them — the informal networks of information about jobs and educational opportunity, or about child care and other basic family needs, that pave a way for most American families toward career mobility and a rising standard of living. Opportunities and services may be available, but they are removed from many Near Northside residents by barriers of distance, cost, or language.

In the mid-1990s, the Near Northside Partners' Council, once an all-volunteer network of neighborhood residents, hired its first full-time staff and took on the task of finding or creating those mainstream opportunities in its community. The plan got a significant boost in 1999, when the Council became one of five centers for a national demonstration called the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative, sponsored by the Rockefeller and J. P. Morgan Chase Foundations and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and working in partnership with the Urban Institute and the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC). After an extensive planning period, the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative started full operation in the Near Northside in 2000, and the early results are both encouraging and surprising.

Although the preliminary research and planning left no doubt that residents would respond in large numbers to an offer of training and job referrals, one surprise has been a flood of applications specifically from

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women. Based partly on cultural patterns in Latin America, the Partners' Council had imagined that women might be slower than men to apply for training, or to envision themselves on a career track. Instead, women have made up the overwhelming majority of early enrollees, even for classes that were specifically scheduled in non-work hours so that all employed people could attend. Men have, however, responded in rising numbers to opportunities for technical training, among other skill-intensive programs — everything from basic computer operations to specific career tracks in telecommunications and computer support functions.

To build and fine-tune its web of training and services, the Council has had to rely on a network of cooperating organizations with different specialties. Tarrant County College, for example, has recruited intensively from the neighborhood and offered some classes on-site. The Fort Worth Independent School District now offers a full range of English classes in the neighborhood. The Women's Center, a citywide service organization, has provided case management, soft-skills training, and crisis counseling both in its own offices and at the Center's headquarters. A local church has made classroom space available at modest rent. The county workforce board has brokered hiring and training relationships with some key employers and created an Employers' Advisory Council for the Center. In short, the Partners' Council has begun to mobilize all the crucial elements of a functioning labor market — from education to hiring and training, from transportation to networking — around a goal of significantly boosting employment in its neighborhood.

Barely a year into its operation, it is far too soon to declare the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative in the Near Northside a success or to predict how much of its ambitious goals it can accomplish. The point of this report is to describe the particular challenge it faces — helping residents not just to enter the workforce but to think of the job market and their own skills more expansively — and the approach it has taken to that challenge. American debate on workforce policy has tended to concentrate on communities where work is rare, public assistance is widespread, and residents are fatalistic about their prospects in the labor force. That is not the profile of the Near Northside. But like plenty of other American neighborhoods — many though not all of them immigrant communities — its high rates of employment coincide with deeply entrenched poverty and isolation.

Tactics for addressing that combination of circumstances may be different, in some ways, from those needed in neighborhoods with low employment. But both kinds of communities have at least one thing in

common: When residents believe that their opportunities are few and their current circumstances are all but permanent, both the opportunities and the psychology of the community need to change. Building connections to the labor market is one part of that task. The other part is building confidence among residents that the connections will truly work for *them*.

Finding the right changes, and making them a palpable reality in the Near Northside, is what the Partners Council and the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative have set out to achieve in Fort Worth. This report describes what they've done so far and outlines the challenges that lie ahead.

INTRODUCTION: PUSHING THE LIMITS

The following pages describe an ambitious approach to the intermingled issues of culture, work, and poverty in a single neighborhood of Fort Worth, Texas. Yet this is not a story about a "culture of work" or a "culture of poverty" — at least not in any of the usual senses of those expressions. What makes the experience of Fort Worth's Near Northside Partners Council (NNPC) significant is that it involves a combination of economic and cultural challenges that are increasingly common in low-income neighborhoods of U.S. cities, particularly in immigrant communities. Yet it's a combination that doesn't readily fit the conventional terms of American social policy.

By and large, those terms rely on two fundamental distinctions that don't fit Fort Worth's Near Northside. The first distinction pits chronic, intergenerational poverty and dependency (a "culture of poverty") against individual initiative, hard work, and independence (a "culture of work"). The normally reasonable theory behind this dichotomy is that long-term poverty and isolation can breed despair and resignation, while work encourages discipline and ambition. In intensely poor communities that have little interaction with mainstream society, the theory goes, adults lack job opportunities, and children grow up without the habits and expectations of success that lead others naturally into the labor force. Poverty thus perpetuates itself, according to this theory, by incubating habits that lead only to more poverty. That reckoning may fit some poor communities fairly well — but not Fort Worth's Near Northside, for reasons that this report will explore.

The second traditional distinction juxtaposes community development — usually seen as an effort to repair a neighborhood's physical and

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social fabric — against workforce development. The latter is typically viewed as an individual matter that concerns the particular skills and disadvantages of each person and family, regardless of where they live. In this theory, "community" and "individual" occupy separate poles.

Yet, curiously, this second distinction is in some ways at odds with the first. If it is the isolation and concentration of poor *communities* that keep them from reaping the benefits of employment (as distinction 1 would have it), then surely combating poverty would entail the creation of less isolated, more enterprising communities. But thanks to distinction 2, that is not the way federal and state policies have evolved. With their separate bureaucracies, think tanks, and budgets, urban revitalization and workforce programs typically concentrate on either collective or individual action, respectively, but hardly ever on both.

The Neighborhood Jobs Initiative

To help bridge that artificial separation, The Rockefeller Foundation, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the J. P. Morgan Chase Foundation, the Urban Institute, and the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) teamed up in 1996 to create the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative, or NJI. The Initiative's central question, as MDRC later framed it, is: "How can we best improve access to employment for the eight million people who, living in pockets of entrenched poverty, remain isolated from mainstream work opportunities?" Starting in five cities, including Fort Worth, the Initiative sought to blend communitarian and individual approaches to work and poverty, operating through constellations of community-based organizations in each place. Working in behalf of the Initiative's other partners, MDRC channels financial and technical assistance to groups in each locality to help them organize and carry out their own version of NJI: a community-wide response to low skills, inexperience, and other obstacles to employment.

In some of those communities, it must be said, distinction 1 is still valid. In places where poor families have been concentrated for generations — sometimes through deliberate public policies that walled them off from other neighborhoods — unemployment, inadequate education, and dependence on welfare have remained crushingly high. Partly as a result, the normal patterns of work and self-improvement have been all but obliterated. In these neighborhoods, the Initiative does train its sights, at least in part, on creating a culture of work as traditionally understood.

But like many urban communities, particularly those with high immigration from poor countries, Fort Worth's Near Northside doesn't fit that pattern. Instead, it illustrates a little-understood but increasingly common admixture of very low incomes and *high* employment, where work is common, but opportunity is scarce; where housing is substandard, but home-ownership is high; and where most income is earned, but economic crisis is a daily threat. In the Near Northside, "long-term poverty" does not equate to "long-term dependency," and "widespread employment" does not translate into "steady economic advancement." Life is lived in between those easy dualities.

"Now I know that I can do it"

This middle ground is occupied by people like Rosario (real person, fictitious name). In training to become a nurse's aide and studying to earn a high-school equivalency diploma, Rosario is among the first participants in NNPC's assortment of outreach, training, and employment programs that was developed with a network of other service and educational organizations. As in the other pilot studies in the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative, NNPC's mix of programs aims at boosting neighborhood employment and earnings significantly, in hopes of building communities that encourage and support employment as their primary means of local development. But uniquely among those programs, NNPC's challenge is not to introduce residents to work opportunity — most adults in the neighborhood already have jobs — but to introduce them to the possibility of advancement in the mostly middle-class, English-speaking world beyond the neighborhood's boundaries.

Rosario, like her parents and most of her neighbors, does not receive public assistance and has never expected to live on anything but earned income. But as the daughter of Mexican immigrants who came to Texas to escape destitution, she also did not grow up expecting that her family income would compare with U.S. averages or that she herself would work outside the home. She imagined a life, still fairly common in the Near Northside, in which only the husband earns money, and the most basic necessities are usually provided for (as they often were not in Mexico), but in which the work is always going to be grueling, and covering costs will be a perpetual struggle.

But then, married and pregnant in her teens, Rosario confronted an even crueler version of reality: an abusive husband, a need to help support the

family, and a crippling lack of education and skills. Soon after enrolling in NNPC's training program, she wrote this in a note to her teacher:

> ***When my first baby was born my husband was in jail. I was a single mom and a first-time mom, alone, all at once. I worked and supported my family for about nine months [and] went to GED [General Educational Development] classes. I was so happy, and I wanted to go to school again. But [after my husband returned home] I found out I was pregnant again and by now our relationship was horrible. . . . My husband and I are separated now, [and] I've been down in the dumps these last three months. Finally, my uncle told me about the [nurse's aide training] program, and I thought, "I'm going for it."***
>
> ***You are my biggest [influence] of all now. . . . Not many people encourage or congratulate me on my work or thoughts. To me, that means a lot. I thank you because when I do become a pediatric nurse or doctor, it will be thanks to you. . . . I've decided to go to college, and that's also thanks to you, because now I know that I can do it.***

Perhaps unwittingly, Rosario's uncle was a frontline agent in NNPC's relentless outreach campaign. Relying heavily on word-of-mouth recruitment, the organization uses its extensive contacts in the neighborhood — those who come in for counseling or referrals, students in current classes, people who attend neighborhood meetings — to spread the word to neighbors, friends, and relatives. Ads, fliers, and formal presentations play a prominent supporting role. But none of those has been as powerful as the community grapevine. One example: To recruit a dozen participants for the first nurse's aide class, NNPC held three informal orientation meetings. The first one drew 8 people. But with no further advertising, the second meeting brought in 14 more. The third meeting, less than a week later, held 16. Each time, participants passed the word, and the circle grew.

As of this writing, the resulting class has 18 students, 6 more than planned, with a lengthening waiting list for the next session. That is mostly the work of people like Rosario's uncle, who attended none of the orientation sessions but evidently got the word from someone who did. In public policy discussions, the term "community" can take on an ethereal quality where real meaning is hard to pin down. In NNPC's classrooms and placement offices, it means something both concrete and deceptively mundane: people talking to one another about the future and how to improve it.

Work without opportunity

The change in Rosario's life has been primarily a change in expectations — a culture shift, in a sense — from an image of a life permanently at home, unskilled and struggling, to an image of life as a nurse or doctor, in charge of her own destiny. Yet hers has not been the kind of culture shift typically envisioned in debates over "dependency" and the "culture of poverty." Rosario needed no program or service agency to prompt her to work and support her family. Simple necessity accomplished that without any organized help. What Rosario needed was an introduction not to a culture of work but to a culture of opportunity — a visible, realistic path to something satisfying and challenging, and some assurance that, despite her interrupted education, she could make bigger plans for herself. Clearing that path often means building routes of access for whole communities: reliable transportation, manageable training opportunities, better networks of communication.

To encourage that kind of change in opportunities and expectations, the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative begins with this practical objective: "bringing the level of adult employment among neighborhood residents to the level of the surrounding region over a period of several years." The program's theory is that reaching "saturation levels" of employment in poor communities will lower the social and psychological barriers that bind people in a cordon of minimal expectations, self-doubt, and distrust of outside help. It will knit the various, normally disjointed, elements of a typical employment economy (transportation, training and workforce programs, education, employers' groups, family and children's programs) into a functioning whole. And in the end, it will make a difference that is big enough and concentrated enough to show the rest of society that employment services work and are worth the investment.

To that basic formula, NNPC adds this crucial elaboration: "In the context of the Near Northside, we interpret 'saturation' to include ... increased wages and quality of employment." The reasons for this additional goal become clearer from the neighborhood profile in the next section. But they are evident, in capsule form, in Rosario's story. In the Near Northside, social norms demand work, but the odds of success remain small, and, particularly for women, those norms rank self-improvement fairly low among the objectives of a normal life.

The power of common expectations

In any kind of community, opportunity is largely a matter of expectations, a calculation of probability and limits: *What do I expect of myself? What do I expect of the people and institutions around me? And what do I believe those people expect of me?* For each individual, the answers to those questions are governed partly by the particulars of personality and family history. But to a profound if subtle degree, the answers are also the result of similar calculations being made simultaneously in all the surrounding homes, businesses, and social institutions. As many parents have learned to their distress, these community calculations can easily overwhelm other messages that families try to deliver at home. It is much harder to grow up confident and ambitious in a neighborhood where the rewards of ambition are invisible.

When NNPC was first planning its approach to the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative in 1999 and early 2000, it conducted surveys and organized a series of focus groups made up of residents of the neighborhood. Among the questions posed to the groups were "What would you consider a good-quality job?" and "What kind of job might you hope to have someday?" The responses included office workers and hospital aides but not teachers or lawyers. When asked why they hadn't mentioned such higher-skilled positions, many participants answered that they simply didn't know anyone who had those jobs. Their aspirations aimed at the best elements of what they knew; the horizon was defined in large part by what the people close to them had achieved.

The effect of community expectations can be greater or less, depending on how much it costs (in a broad sense) to deviate from the norm. When the costs are low — when, for example, families can easily move elsewhere or when churches or social groups readily provide alternative avenues of learning, recreation, and social development — children and adults might routinely break with the surrounding patterns. When such alternatives are scarce; or when they involve costly arrangements for tuition, transportation, and child care; or when they carry significant risks of failure, the prevailing patterns can be all but insurmountable.

In this sense, then, the employment efforts of the Neighborhood Job Initiative are, in the words of a consultant to the program, fundamentally "a community development strategy, not just an employment program." In NNPC's particular approach to the Initiative, the objective is not only to create an environment of real and perceived economic opportunity but

also to boost the means by which residents can buy and maintain homes, renovate neglected properties, start businesses, take part in civic projects, and wield more influence in public policy. (The challenge in this last area is particularly striking: In Fort Worth, where more than one-third of the population is Latino, there is still no Latino member of the City Council.)

At this point, the isolation of many Near Northside residents — including many who have jobs — is reinforced by unreliable (or nonexistent) transportation to other parts of town, scarce child care, the relatively high cost of many skills programs, and the daunting necessity for many adult residents to learn English before they can tackle most other challenges. Even so, many residents manage to hold down low-skill, entry-level jobs in which language is relatively unimportant and transportation and other daily necessities can be patched together well enough to keep a paycheck coming. The problem, in other words, is not total unemployment and destitution but the lack of a second rung on the ladder. For too many people, there is no realistic route to self-improvement.

Lacking English, some employees may not hear about promotion or training opportunities — or couldn't pursue such opportunities if they did hear about them — without first mastering English. Lacking a car of their own, some residents may not be able to get from a daytime job to a nighttime class in another part of town, especially after buses stop running for the night. Lacking any friends who have attended a community college class, someone with no formal education in the United States may have no idea whether he or she could actually handle the course requirements — or find a job that justifies the cost and difficulty of the training.

All those circumstances, and expectations they engender, can change — as they have for Rosario and her classmates. Whether they do so will depend in part on the success of NNPC and its network of training, education, and social service organizations, together with a widening circle of Fort Worth employers. If, in five to ten years, Rosario's experience becomes typical — and if the exceptional coalition of employers, educators, and community leaders that built her program holds together — her image of life as a skilled professional (or, for other people, as a business owner or tradesperson) may likewise become the norm.

This report describes how NNPC and its partners envision that transformation taking place and the early steps they have taken to make it happen.

A PROFILE OF THE COMMUNITY AND ITS WORKFORCE

Many of the houses on Fort Worth's Near Northside show signs of age and wear, sometimes of neglect or deferred maintenance, and often of poverty. Some are large by the standards of central cities elsewhere — 2,000 or 2,500 square-foot bungalow or prairie-style homes with four or five bedrooms — though most are smaller and simpler: basic frame houses with two bedrooms and modest yards. The median home value is roughly $40,000 — less than half the value typical in the city as a whole. Every few houses, there's a building that needs roof or window repair, exterior paint, storm gutters — routine but relatively costly work that ranks below the weekly necessities of food, transportation, school costs, and clothing. The occasional house is vacant or in severe disrepair, but that is not the norm.

Nearby commercial areas are underused but not abandoned, and some small businesses, including restaurants and small grocery stores, are busy. Spanish is the main language nearly everywhere. Churches and public properties like schools, parks, and police and fire stations are all in serviceable repair, though many are showing their age and need at least cosmetic work of one kind or another. The Near Northside is, in short, the kind of poor but functioning immigrant community typical of many older urban neighborhoods, especially in the South and West, where current conditions are calm and mostly livable but the longer-term outlook is uncertain.

The neighborhood is both poorer and, in some ways, stronger than these surface impressions might suggest. Median household income is just under $23,000 a year — more than 40 percent below that of Fort Worth as a whole. Just 41 percent of Near Northside residents have a high school diploma or the equivalent; the citywide number is well over 70 percent. Yet employment is comparatively high — just 17 percent lower than Fort Worth's citywide employment rate — and welfare recipiency is minuscule, with roughly 300 of the area's 13,000 residents receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

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(TANF). Employment among men is more than 70 percent, which is comparable to Fort Worth's 77 percent citywide rate.

Significantly, the employment rate in the Near Northside is the highest of all the communities participating in the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative: 56 percent of all adults have jobs, compared with 46 percent to 54 percent in NJI's other sites. Yet many jobs are temporary or seasonal, pay minimum wage (or in some illegal cases, less) and offer no prospect for advancement. Still, even the worst of these jobs have two advantages important to many Near Northside workers: They require little or no English, and they do not demand skills or credentials that are normally available only in English.

With a Latino population rising above 80 percent of the neighborhood, and a high percentage of adults speaking only Spanish or only very limited English, much of the information about available jobs travels by word of mouth; vacancies are "announced" largely by current employees informing their friends or relatives. Many of the things that recent immigrants or less skilled applicants might want to know about a job — Is English required? Or literacy? What about immigration status? — are best learned from acquaintances, not in job interviews. As a result, information on employment opportunity is uneven, is not always strictly accurate, and tends to favor those whose friends and family include a network of steadily employed people. (Even then, the information tends to lead mainly to jobs with low wages and few benefits.) In its series of focus groups and surveys, NNPC heard repeatedly that both residents and employers wanted a more consistent, reliable clearinghouse for information about work and training opportunities, particularly one that would reach people who aren't woven into the existing networks.

In a community where English is not the main language and many residents speak only Spanish, it becomes a double challenge to persuade residents that they can move up a career ladder or take on a new, more rewarding line of work. If the first challenge is to learn English, then tangible opportunities for job advancement instantly become more remote, especially for adults. Not only does language-learning ability deteriorate somewhat with advancing age, but the fear of adjusting to a new, all-English-speaking world surely grows greater the longer one has functioned in Spanish alone. For an adult facing three, four, or five years of study before being able to function easily in English, it will be hard to stay motivated long enough to envision learning a trade, earning a GED, or tackling other education and training that may be offered primarily or solely in English.

Employment and gender

Another side-effect of life in a largely immigrant community is that traditional social patterns don't necessarily fit well into the structure of the modern American labor market. "It's like a little Mexico here," said a Fort Worth educator who is herself the daughter of Mexican immigrants:

> ***Some people still think the man is the worker and the woman should stay home and take care of the kids and have supper on the table when he gets home. They feel comfortable in this area, even in deplorable conditions, because they can speak only Spanish — and because they have steady work, even if only at minimum wage. Most people approach GED and ESL [English as a Second Language] just to conduct minimum business and meet minimum standards, not to advance or pursue careers. The economic classes don't mingle here, so unskilled people aren't in touch with those who have moved up. They preserve the social patterns from Mexico, which keeps them from seeing the possibilities.***

Given those traditional patterns, NNPC originally thought that it would be harder to enroll women in its training programs. Its initial plan for the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative, based on extensive consultations with residents and local service organizations, accordingly set a reduced goal for female employment.

A number of unemployed women have chosen to stay in the home and are not actively seeking to work. The choice to remain a homemaker is often born of the need to care for children, but also is in part related to cultural norms. As a result, instead of targeting an employment rate for neighborhood women (now 44.7 percent) that equals that of women in the region (60.5 percent), we will set the target halfway (52.6 percent).[1]

In its research leading up to the employment effort, NNPC convened focus groups and surveyed residents across the neighborhood about the barriers keeping them from employment or advancement. Although responses varied widely, one barrier that usually scores high in other communities did not end up at the top of NNPC's list: child care. The one essential that normally bars the door to employment for many women

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[1] Near Northside Planning Council, "NJI Implementation Plan: Achieving Employment saturation in the Near Northside Neighborhood of Fort Worth, Texas" (Near Northside Planning Council, Inc., 1999, p. 9).

with children didn't surface prominently in these preliminary discussions. Instead, residents tended to cite a lack of skills, English proficiency, basic education, and transportation as their main obstacles in the labor market.

Yet child care has, in fact, been a serious issue, because it has been women who thus far have turned out in the greatest numbers to take advantage of NNPC's programs. Here, it seems, the "social patterns" on the Near Northside may be less durable than some observers at first believed. While many, or even most, young women in the neighborhood may have begun their adult life expecting to remain at home, the availability of training and employment opportunity apparently has quickly changed their expectations. In many cases, though, their view was altered not by a sense of opportunity but by simple necessity. Like the case of Rosario described in the previous section, many young women of the Near Northside have been propelled into the workforce, like it or not, by economic or family emergencies that left them no choice.

So whether because of need or preference, NNPC has found itself at the center of an early, but potentially profound, social shift. At this point, staff members estimate that women make up at least 70 percent of their programs' enrollment. Although the magnitude of this response is greater than NNPC's leaders originally expected, they had always intended to tailor some services and programs specifically to women. Among the first partners that NNPC enlisted for outreach, case management, and other services under the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative was the Women's Center of Tarrant County, a highly regarded Fort Worth employment and social service program aimed prominently, though not exclusively, at women.

At first, the partnership with the Women's Center wasn't based primarily on an expectation of a giant influx of women participants but on the Center's general reputation for high-quality case management and on its highly regarded "life skills" training program. The latter is a combination of traditional "soft" skills, or "work readiness" preparation, and help in coping with the logistical demands of regular employment (transportation, health care, child care, finances, and so on). But as the number of women enrolling in the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative grew, the Center's experience with women's advocacy and crisis services became a more and more important part of its relationship with NNPC.

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The ratio of women to men in the NNPC jobs initiative will probably decrease over time. Among other things, as one staff member pointed out, women may be finding it easier, initially, to seek training and education from NNPC. Again for reasons of culture or gender psychology, men may be less inclined to acknowledge an educational deficiency, or to ask for help and training, than women are — at least at first. As more and more men use the program and pass the word along, it may become more "acceptable" for other men to enroll.

Also, some occupations traditionally filled by men are expensive to train for, and cost-effective training programs are hard to develop on a small, neighborhood scale. One example is warehouse work. Although the demand for warehouse employees is exceptionally high in Fort Worth (a prime transit and storage hub for national and international cargo), training for these jobs isn't easily done in a classroom. NNPC uses a new computer simulation of warehouse tasks called EnterTech, developed by IC^2, a high-tech think tank at the University of Texas at Austin. But the program still lacks the means for hands-on training with forklifts, palettes, and other physical staples of a typical warehouse. By contrast, training for clerical or nursing-home jobs, more traditionally held by women, requires minimal space and only basic equipment. Of course, the job stereotypes, like other inherited social patterns, may change over time. But for now, both the demand from residents and the available curricula tend to tilt disproportionately toward women.

Meanwhile, though, significantly more men use NNPC's job development and referral services than sign up for training and education. Even if some men are uneasy about taking classes or enrolling in English courses, they are less reluctant about asking for referrals and getting help with applications, résumés, and interview tactics. Those who are more open to skills training tend to sign up for computer classes at NNPC or for various occupational skills courses at Tarrant County College, another partner in the Near Northside's Neighborhood Jobs Initiative.

In short, the challenge of changing expectations and creating a "culture of opportunity" may be slightly different for women than for men. Whereas women may need encouragement to think of themselves as ambitious, potentially skilled employees, working men may more often need to be encouraged to envision themselves as trainees or students. In both cases, the challenge is not just to change a self-image that may

be tethered to traditional stereotypes but also to build a supportive community of neighbors and acquaintances who have already broken out of those stereotypes and who serve as living evidence that changing patterns can be rewarding.

One group of Near Northside residents may play a wildcard role in fueling that gradual change: A very small but promising minority of low-income residents are actually well-educated or trained people — professionals, skilled tradespeople, or just expert workers — who don't speak English and whose mostly Mexican credentials aren't readily accepted in the United States. Many of these residents, both men and women, have settled into low-paying jobs that make little use of their training. Yet they could advance considerably with a little help learning English, transferring their credentials to U.S. equivalents, and making up whatever gaps in training keep them from pursuing their former careers here. "We have engineers and dentists working as dishwashers," says a staff member at NNPC. "Except for some English and maybe a few other courses, they could be making two or three times what they're making now. They just can't see how that's going to happen for them. Our challenge is to show them."

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TRAINING, EMPLOYMENT, AND PARTNERSHIP

It would be impossible for any one organization to deal expertly with the huge variety of challenges that confront Near Northsiders in the labor force. They include limited work skills, lack of English proficiency, scarce information about available jobs and services, family and child care problems, poor transportation, and more. NNPC held no illusion that it could address all these issues on its own, while at the same time also carrying out an aggressive outreach and community-organizing program for residents and employers and working on other aspects of community development. Given that the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative nationwide aims at "saturation" levels of employment and at wage improvement in each community, it assumes that neighborhood organizations will need to assemble a team of specialized partners to provide services that can be expanded, adapted, and coordinated in meeting those goals.

That has proved to be easier in some places than in others. "When we started," says NNPC Executive Director Abby Gamboa, "our goal was only to be the broker, not to provide services. We thought our job would be just to make sure that other programs and agencies reached the residents of this community [in greater numbers]. We'd help the programs and the residents find each other, and that's how we'd reach saturation." Residents seemed to believe the same thing at the time. In the planning stage of the Initiative, focus group members repeatedly said that they believed services were available in the community but that it was hard to find them or to fit them together. "But in reality," Gamboa now says, "we didn't find all the services we thought were out there. There were big gaps, and we've found we need to be an employment program in our own right."

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Yet NNPC also knew that it could not simply create a "saturation" employment program from whole cloth. Working alone at first, with no staff, Gamboa had no interest in building a huge organization of specialists in every line of training and counseling, nor would there be available money in all of Fort Worth's education and employment budgets to fund that kind of expansion. The essential NJI model, built around a partnership of specialized organizations, would have to be made to work in the Near Northside, even if it would have to be supplemented here and there with direct service by NNPC.

Existing programs would have to be persuaded to focus their services more intently on Near Northside residents, without major increases in their budgets. NNPC would help them with a crucial element that most programs said they needed: a way of recruiting participants and opening channels of communication with the neighborhood's Latino families, among whom these programs were not well known. But even then, the saturation plan wouldn't be complete without NNPC's directly filling some gaps — particularly in providing referral, training, child care, and computer labs in the neighborhood, close to homes and families. Most of the available partners weren't located in, or in some cases even close to, the Near Northside.

The challenge for NNPC was therefore partly diplomatic and partly logistical. On the one hand, finding first-rate organizations that would make a specific commitment to one neighborhood without major grants took some persuading. On the other hand, the neighborhood had something valuable to offer in exchange: The Near Northside's large population of eligible trainees could be a big benefit to service providers who needed to boost their enrollments. For organizations looking for help with recruitment, NNPC's reputation for effective outreach — earned through years of organizing, outreach, and volunteer effort — proved to be a powerful enticement.

Some partners were also drawn to the neighborhood by NNPC's major logistical asset: classroom space. Primera Iglesia Bautista, one of four Baptist churches in the immediate vicinity, had offered a vacant former school building for both offices and classrooms at modest rent. The classrooms aren't all in good repair, and several aren't usable yet, but the building is an enormous resource rarely available to small nonprofits just starting an employment program.

English: The challenges of teaching and learning

Among the earliest users of the church's classroom space has been the Fort Worth Independent School District, which provides community ESL classes across five counties under a contract with the state. The district's participation illustrates the virtues of enlisting expert partners as architects of the program, not just as service providers: Working with NNPC, school district instructors and administrators are beginning to tailor their ESL curriculum to "workforce literacy," so that students will quickly learn words and expressions useful in seeking employment and starting a job. When a nursing-home chain needed ESL classes specifically for nurse's aide trainees, a school district instructor quickly adapted the standard curriculum to concentrate on the language of elementary nursing and personal care.

Another NNPC partner, the two-year Tarrant County College, offers a different approach to ESL that is more academic in style and has more formal testing and grading requirements. The college offers its first-level course in NNPC's classrooms, but thereafter students have to attend classes on-campus. And unlike the school district classes, Tarrant County College charges tuition of $55 per semester. But the more demanding, formal approach suits some participants well — especially those who plan on further college education. Sylvia Martinez, Assistant Dean for Continuing Education at Tarrant County College, explains that the extra demands are meant to encourage students to think of English classes as the beginning of a longer education:

> ***Our ESL is tailored to keeping people in school, to make it possible for them to complete degrees or study higher-level skills that can really help them advance. So the vocabulary is more academic, to prepare them for course work. . . . We want them to think beyond their own community, beyond basic skills and minimum wage, beyond the world where they can function only in Spanish. It's not right for everybody, but for someone who needs to feel committed to something, and who might value some structure and discipline, this may be much better than the more self-directed approaches to ESL.***

The strain of leaning English is a double bind for many adult residents of the Near Northside. On one hand, classroom and practice time drain scarce personal hours normally devoted to work and family. ("I had to give up one of my three jobs to take these classes," a recent student said. "That meant I had less money now to take care of my family. But the

classes mean I'll earn more money later, so that someday I won't need to work so many jobs.") On the other hand, studying English in spare hours after a long workday, with few opportunities to practice, means that fluency for most people will take years of work. School district administrators estimate that the typical ESL student will need five years of twice-a-week classes to make up the equivalent of a year and a half of full-time study.

Given the long struggle ahead for most adult ESL students, preserving motivation is a constant challenge. Beginning-English classes, says NNPC's Director of the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative, David Lozano, "are always full — 20 or 22 students per class with long waiting lists. But then by the intermediate level we have 10 or 12 students left. By the advanced class, it's more like five or six. So the trick is to come up with ways of keeping people motivated after the initial excitement has worn off, and the expectations have come down to earth, and people know how much work it's going to be."

One solution is to offer a benefit to more advanced students that isn't available to those at entry level. Since so many participants want to hone their computer skills, Lozano plans to devise an intensive computer-skills course in Spanish, limited to those who reach advanced ESL. The point will be to offer desirable training in students' most comfortable language while actually boosting the incentive to persist in learning the new language.

The demand for computer skills

The interest in computer training runs highest of all the skills courses, partly because computers are important in so many lines of work and partly because this area of job skills straddles many of the gender stereotypes. Admittedly, women still tend to enroll in "office assistant" training, whereas men take "introduction to computer" courses. But in reality the basic skills in each course aren't so different. As many other training programs have discovered, the subtleties of nomenclature and instructional style can help students fit comfortably into a course that, by some other name, might not have appealed to them.

Available subsidies for computer instruction in the Near Northside are already in full use, with no increase (and maybe some reduction) on the horizon. Yet the demand is so urgent that students recently told David Lozano that they would gladly pay the cost of an instructor and text-

books just to ensure that a course is available for them. (The students' commitment to the program didn't stop there. More than 25 of them volunteered their services in painting and readying a run-down classroom for use in the fall.) The cost per student for the course is likely to be about $40 a semester.

NNPC's two computer labs contain a total of 17 machines, five donated by IBM and the rest purchased under part of an earlier grant from the city. The labs are in nearly constant use, not only for the direct skills-training classes but also for self-directed training in other areas, like English, GED preparation, and the simulated warehouse program described earlier. It's also clear that students could be using computers substantially more for English tutorials and practice — if only there were enough machines and labs.

To some extent, the demand for computer classes and practice time is an almost universal problem among training, education, and employment programs. The use of computers in the workplace has expanded and changed so fast that even people with steady work experience need to catch up or improve their skills. But the importance of computer training in a primarily Spanish-speaking community is doubled: Not only are the skills essential, but they also demand and reinforce the use of English. Although it's possible to use software without learning the language, skilled users will at least understand "File," "Edit," "Delete" and so on, along with the many related expressions that are specific to various software applications.

The link between computer classes and learning English grows stronger when English exercises are available on disk in the computer lab. NNPC is therefore working on converting one of Primera Iglesia Bautista's unused classrooms into an ESL resource center, to include dedicated computers with language software as well as English audio- and videotapes.

Widening the scope: Other skills and assistance

The broad appeal of computer skills and training is partly a side-effect of the sudden and rapid growth of computers in all aspects of life. Besides the influence of computers in almost every workplace, the technology tends to bridge the gender gap as few occupational skills have ever done: Boys increasingly learn to type, and girls increasingly master engineering and programming jargon, partly because the ubiquity of computers has made it acceptable, even necessary, to do so. Still, for

all the popularity of computer classes, a great many of those looking for help at NNPC are actually drawn to much lower-tech work, at least to start.

NNPC's newest, and so far highly popular, training program involves no computers at all, at least at this stage. It combines English classes and GED preparation with job-specific training for entry-level work in nursing homes. The next section will describe this program in more detail, to illustrate how the various programs and services of NNPC fit together into a single process that moves residents quickly into skills, jobs, and advancement opportunities. But to build this process into a true employment-*saturation* effort, there will need to be a broad mix of such programs, reaching a greater variety of skill levels and types of work. And collateral efforts in job development and supportive services will have to expand in proportion, to accommodate the wide-ranging needs of a whole neighborhood.

At this point, the list of training opportunities through NNPC is already fairly long and still growing. Besides the curricula mentioned already, Tarrant County College offers a long menu of specialized skills courses corresponding to the most available jobs in the Fort Worth area. These include, for example, three levels of training for computer network technicians — running from basic cabling (which doesn't require a mastery of English) all the way to "A-plus" certification, which equips a trainee to perform routine maintenance on a computer network and to help end-users solve basic technical problems. Tuition for such courses can be high — the A-plus training alone costs $5,000. But vouchers from the Tarrant County Work Advantage program will cover that cost, if students can reach the college campus, 6 miles west of the Near Northside.[2]

Here is where the partnership between Tarrant County College and NNPC becomes most significant. The college courses would, of course, be offered anyway. Near Northside residents would be welcome to take them, partnership or no partnership. But to many Near Northside residents, the college is a world away — beyond the psychological western boundary of the Loop 820 highway. And no matter how welcoming it may be, the college is a degree-granting institution that people with modest skills frequently regard as too hard or too elite for them. Seen through the eyes of a central-city manual laborer or housecleaner, says

[2]As of this writing, NNPC and the college are trying to raise money to offer an A-plus course in the Near Northside neighborhood as well.

Assistant Dean Sylvia Martinez, the college campus is "another planet — it's not part of our area, and it's a remote, demanding institution that's way beyond what I can do."

Overcoming these limitations — whether they be systemic or self-imposed — is crucial to the employment-saturation challenge. NNPC tackles them at every step of its process, beginning at the front door, where intake worker Maria Galvan guides applicants through a basic assessment and career plan and helps them envision how they could overcome barriers. For example, she might talk residents through a plan for fitting a training regimen into their schedules and keeping up with the coursework while holding a full-time job or meeting family obligations. The efforts continue in crisis counseling or case management, either in-house or through partners like the Women's Center. Orientation and job search workshops emphasize the broad range of career choices, from short- to long-term, and help participants plot a reliable course from training to employment to promotion. The local one-stop employment center outstations an officer at NNPC four days a week, in the afternoons and evenings, to help eligible people apply for training vouchers or other services of the county Work Advantage system, to help defray the cost of training, or to learn where more-convenient options may lie. Employment Services Coordinator Cal Martinez refers trained or experienced residents directly to job openings with employers whose needs she is constantly researching — and in the process, she also looks for opportunities for advancement or additional training that applicants may not have considered.

Even among the most readily employable visitors to NNPC, Martinez says,

> ***... we have beauticians who never got certified, but they do hair at home. Guys do yardwork, women clean houses, all on their own — no raises, no chance of doing better. There are people hauling crates in warehouses or mopping floors who used to supervise 400 people [before coming to the United States]. Some of them are even bilingual, but they think they have to get a GED, or they have to speak and write more perfect English, or whatever. Except for learning the possibilities from someone like us, some of them would just stay in those jobs forever, because they think they have to.***

In classrooms, too, the instruction is geared not just to teaching skills but also to imagining where those skills can lead, and to overcoming the temptation to give up before reaching the goal. English teacher Juanita Rodriguez-Griffith, for example, makes it a point to let students know

that her own background is not much different from theirs, even though today she holds a master's degree and was once named Texas Professor of the Year:

> ***I had to quit school at 12 to support my mom and five other kids. I worked in the cotton fields, and I didn't speak a word of English until I started school. I taught my mother to read and write Spanish. So when students say they don't think they can make it, or there are too many obstacles in the way, I tell them my story. . . . Some of them may need a shoulder to cry on. They're scared. I was scared, too.***

To be sure, planning a work life beyond the neighborhood means confronting more than psychological barriers. Public transportation to and from the Near Northside is minimal. Attending the county college or working outside the neighborhood all but requires a car. Through a Chase Bank micro-loan program, NNPC can offer up to $750 for any purpose related to getting, keeping, or advancing in a job. Car downpayments or repair costs are a common use for the money, which is repayable over one to three years.

Another obstacle to working or studying outside the neighborhood is child care. For that, the short-term solutions are few, but NNPC and another partner agency, Campfire Boys and Girls, Inc., are working toward a longer-term answer: a curriculum leading to child care certification for in-home providers. For residents who need work but can't leave home or children during the day, providing child care for others may be a practical solution — one that doesn't require immediate fluency in English. Chase Bank loans may be useful here, too, to defray the initial expense of certifying or equipping a business.

Identifying the various obstacles to work, and helping participants overcome them, is primarily the job of case managers. Originally, that service was to be provided exclusively by the Women's Center, but the need for it has grown so quickly that it is now being shared by staff at the center and at NNPC. That is partly because the number of programs and participants has grown rapidly but also because both organizations underestimated the extent of participants' interest in this service and the amount of sustained effort it would take. For example, one case manager, formerly on-staff at the Women's Center, is now a full-time employee of NNPC, just handling the 120 or more trainees preparing for jobs in nursing homes. The two organizations are still experimenting with ways to integrate case management with the other support roles that staff need to play as participants move through various stages of the program from

intake to counseling, training, placement, and post-employment follow-up. The Women's Center will continue to provide some case management, but this is yet another area where NNPC will not be able simply to be the "broker" and referral source for outside services but will have to retain staff to provide some services directly.

Managing an Evolving Program

Planning and operating the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative has demanded constant improvisation from NNPC and its partners — fulfilling the need to respond quickly to new opportunities and to rethink current operations as they absorb the lessons of experience. Beyond that lies the challenge of keeping partners involved and committed to the program, so that they see the benefits to themselves as well as to the Near Northside community. That has added the demands of diplomacy — the effective tending and strengthening of relationships — to the normal responsibilities of day-to-day program management and quality assurance.

It is, in most cases, considerably harder to manage a network of partnerships and alliances than to command a single, vertical structure. The task is at its most challenging in the early years, when relationships are still forming and subject to change, when the needs of trainees and employers are not yet fully understood, and when new opportunities (like the nursing-home program described in the next section) appear without warning and demand major adaptation on short notice. Even under calmer conditions — in older, more established institutions and networks — organizational nimbleness is an indispensable quality for the best workforce programs. The labor market is always changing, as is the population of trainees. But in a broad-based coalition like the one behind the Near Northside's Neighborhood Jobs Initiative, the demands for swift adaptation and innovation can come from several directions at once and can require creativity from several partners at the same time.

Consequently, beyond any individual programmatic issues, NNPC's overarching challenge in mounting the Jobs Initiative has been in finding managers and staff who can work well with other independent teams of people, who thrive on a degree of uncertainty and improvisation, and who can respond effectively when underlying assumptions start to shift. Besides finding and recruiting such people — a process that has produced excellent results after some initial turnover — the long-term challenge becomes one of retention and motivation. As in many areas

of nonprofit activity, the challenge of professional burnout will always be present in the background, and it could take center stage at any time.

Even so, it's important to note that NNPC took extraordinary steps to minimize the elements of surprise and risk by carrying out an exceptionally thorough, careful planning process before starting work on the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative. In 1999, for a full year before the launch date, NNPC conducted research and planning on at least four fronts simultaneously:

- An enterprising door-to-door survey of nearly 1,000 households, with detailed responses from at least 400. The survey covered not only family composition, income, and work history but also attitudes toward current jobs, ideas about further opportunity, and interest in training and other employment services. (One telling finding: Most respondents were reasonably satisfied with their current work, even given poor wages and benefits, but had little confidence in job security, much less promotion.)
- A series of community focus groups, including seven groups of five to eight adults each, and two groups of young people, to discuss needs, opportunities, and problems in greater depth.
- Detailed interviews with community leaders to assess current resources, unmet needs, and possible sources of help from other parts of the neighborhood and greater Fort Worth.
- A market survey of employers to gauge their potential demand for new employees, their interest in training and other workforce services, the opportunities for advancement in their companies, and their willingness to advise or share information with the new program.

All this research and planning benefited from extensive technical help from MDRC, the Urban Institute, and Dr. Guisette Salazar of the School of Urban and Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Arlington. It was, in other words, as careful and far-reaching a preparatory planning exercise as any community organization could hope to mount, and it benefited — thanks to MDRC, HUD, and the Rockefeller and Chase Manhattan Foundations — from more than average resources. Even so, the actual unfolding of the program has presented both programmatic and operational surprises that continually test NNPC's ability to respond, manage, and adapt.

"We feel confident about what we are doing from day to day," says Abby Gamboa. "But we also know that whatever we're doing today will probably be quite different from what we'll be doing a year from now. Probably that keeps us alert. Or at least it makes life interesting."

APEX: HOW ONE PROGRAM FITS THE PIECES TOGETHER

The support of Tarrant County's Work Advantage board and staff has paid big dividends for NNPC and its Neighborhood Jobs Initiative.[3] Besides the weekday presence of the one-stop representative in NNPC's offices, Work Advantage supported an $81,000 federal grant for youth employment services, and earlier it helped NNPC recruit and organize an Employer Advisory Committee, to help tailor the neighborhood program more specifically to employers' needs.

But by far the most striking partnership between NNPC and Work Advantage has been the new APEX program (the acronym stands for "Achieving Program Excellence"), a training regimen for certified nurse's aides. The program was designed with and for a large Fort Worth-area nursing home chain, Integrated Health Systems (IHS). In exchange for recruitment and training provided through NNPC, funded by a Work Advantage grant, IHS begins paying trainees on their first day of class, and it increases the hourly wage roughly eight weeks later, when trainees pass the state licensing exam and start full-time shift work — with benefits.

[3]The support is more than just material. In 2001, NNPC was the board's nominee for the Texas "Service to Workers" award, an annual statewide honor conferred by the Texas Workforce Commission.

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The APEX course is aimed at those with limited English or who lack a high school diploma. One sign of the area's critical shortage of nurse's aides is that IHS is willing to pay trainees $6.50 an hour for attending English and GED classes — five full weeks *before* their intensive skills training begins. Another sign is that IHS agreed to increase its normal nurse's aide salary to $8.00 an hour, effective immediately on qualifying as a licensed nurse's aide, and to increase the wage periodically thereafter if the student stays with the company.

To put it mildly, none of this is normal. Yet competition among Fort Worth employers seeking to hire qualified health care workers in Fort Worth is so heated — even in times of general economic slowdown — that the situation all but dictated unconventional methods. "The shortage of both nurse's and nurse's aides may well be the number one problem in our day-to-day operation in this industry," explains Denise Diersen, a nurse who is IHS's Provider Relations Specialist and the director of the APEX program:

> ***We tried job fairs. We tried employment ads. We tried talking, in a less specific way, to the Workforce Commission. But this is hard, sometimes thankless work, and we simply weren't finding the people we needed to keep our positions filled. So we asked ourselves: Who might want this job who isn't applying for it through the usual channels? One answer was: people with limited English who are now earning $6.50 an hour or less. So the answer seemed to be: What if we incorporate ESL into our training program and raised the wage to $8.00 an hour?***

The wage increase was a crucial consideration for the Work Advantage staff. The program devotes nearly all its attention to jobs by which an employee could support a family, and $8.00 an hour is generally considered the starting point. So when IHS agreed to meet that minimum, and to pay trainees at a lower scale while they were in class, the Work Advantage board agreed to help.

The challenge, as Diersen described it, was almost a mirror image of the challenge facing NNPC. While IHS was looking for people with limited English and low wages, NNPC was looking for job opportunities for just such people. NNPC's problem was that most residents who were desperate for work couldn't afford to carve eight weeks out of their schedule at no pay. "Most people here," says Employment Services

Coordinator Cal Martinez, "will take a job washing dishes before they'll spend six or eight weeks with no income, even if that means tripling their earnings later. They simply don't have the luxury of looking that far into the future." APEX would solve that problem: Even at a low hourly wage, a pay-to-study program would let participants look at least one step beyond the present.

In time, the county Work Advantage team saw an ideal marriage between the nursing home firm and the neighborhood group, and the program was born. The goal, within a year, was set to train and employ 120 nurse's aides, 12 to 15 at a time.

Plan as you go

For various reasons, planning time was just a matter of weeks. But reaching a goal of employment saturation has meant that NNPC has had to learn to seize opportunities quickly. An earlier section of this report described how the organization recruited an overflow class in just three outreach sessions. (This is the same class that includes Rosario, the student whose uncle told her about the opportunity.) Employment Director David Lozano recruited English instructor Juanita Rodriguez-Griffith from among the teachers already working with Near Northside students through the Independent School District's ESL program. Working closely with Denise Diersen at IHS, they have begun designing a curriculum that will swiftly give students the English vocabulary needed in responding to nursing home needs and emergencies and that helps those without high school diplomas (from either Mexico or the United States) to earn a GED.

To complicate matters further, the 18-member class is far from homogeneous. Half the students just meet the "limited English" threshold, which requires the equivalent of a third-grade speaking and literacy level in English. Yet several of these class members have experience with home care or nursing — whether because of having cared for an aged or sick relative or because they had actual work experience in health care before coming to the United States. The other half of the class, however, speak English fluently. These students need little help with the language but hope to pass a GED test (which isn't required for the job) and, in any case, need to learn the rudiments of nursing home work.

Juggling the needs of both groups in a single class, eight hours a day in the nursing home conference room, is Juanita Rodriguez-Griffith.

Alternating between sides of the room, she pivots between lessons in math and formal grammar for the GED students ("Find the predicate in this sentence, and explain whether it agrees with the subject") and in elementary English expressions for the ESL half of the class ("The patient is in pain"; "I will come back"). During breaks, the students go out and meet the residents, helping to push wheelchairs or watching current aides at work. It is unlike any other class at NNPC — or in most employment programs — but it's working.

As Diersen reflects on it:

> ***Juanita tells the students, "You create your own miracle." Well, it turns out that's what we're doing for the residents and the company, too. There's more enthusiasm in this class than I've ever seen — we're not just getting nurse's aides, we're getting enthusiasm, commitment, people who really want to work, and a level of caring about our residents that you don't find just anywhere.***

The students in the APEX class broadly represent the whole challenge that NNPC faces in trying to bring "employment saturation" to the hard circumstances of the Near Northside. Some have never worked; others have worked their whole lives without ever getting ahead. ("When you ask them where they want to be in 10 years," one administrator said, "they look at you like you're nuts. They're just trying to get through the week.") Some are limited by language, others by a lack of other skills or education. Many have to struggle over child care; nearly all worry about transportation. In the first week of class, one student's car broke down, and that meant she'd probably have to drop out of the course. Immediately, the other students passed the hat and collected the money to fix her car.

That, in a tiny anecdote, is a "culture of opportunity" at work. What makes it a "culture" is that it engenders common ideas, behaviors, and values that underlie the way people relate to one another. In this case, students spontaneously demonstrated a common, unspoken belief that dropping out of class was not an option and that random events couldn't be allowed to defeat someone's aspirations. It is a microscopic expression of one key element in the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative's basic philosophy: Communities that expect success will support and encourage residents who are confronting failure. One result: Most of the students in the first APEX class envision further study eventually leading to nursing or other professional credentials. Rosario, as she wrote in a note to Rodriguez-Griffith, eventually contemplates medical school.

NNPC aims to create that sort of opportunity culture not merely among groups of students but among local institutions as well — churches, government workforce agencies, youth programs, counseling centers, public schools and colleges, and city development programs. For residents' expectations to improve, the real opportunities they face, and the practical means of seizing those opportunities, have to improve as well. All the relevant institutions and service programs have been cooperative and friendly with one another in the past. That's not the issue. The point is that they have never before all mobilized around a single, shared goal: employment and advancement for every resident of the Near Northside who wants it.

Over the years, if all goes even approximately as planned, the APEX students will have taken advantage of counseling and referrals from NNPC and the Women's Center, in facilities provided by Primera Iglesia Bautista, with training subsidies from Tarrant County Work Advantage. They will have earned a training stipend, a nurse's aide certification, and a permanent job from Integrated Health Systems. They will have used a basic ESL curriculum provided by the Fort Worth Independent School District. Some, maybe most, will get further training from Tarrant County College or NNPC; a few may take advantage of the Chase Bank JobStart micro-loan program. The number of moving parts needed to make this program work is both its greatest strength and its greatest daily management challenge.

Nor do the various moving parts stop once a participant is trained and employed. Every APEX trainee will be reminded of the continued availability of these resources as need and opportunity arise. Noemi Vela, NNPC's APEX coordinator, has a follow-up and retention program ready for when the first class graduates: She expects to maintain contact with the new nurse's aides and to continue referring them among the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative partners whenever their problems or interests call for it.

Meanwhile, APEX is just one of more than a dozen programs that NNPC is operating or coordinating at once. They, too, constitute challenges of management and coordination that are completely new to NNPC and relatively uncommon throughout the workforce development field. Nothing about this story is yet proven or cast in concrete. But judging from the response of students and job-referral clients, NNPC is already making a difference.

"When I got here," said a recent graduate of one NNPC training program, "it was the first time I'd been around people who were all trying to do what I wanted to do. Working at the hotel [where she cleaned rooms for six years] I never talked to anybody, never learned anything. Learning English didn't matter because nobody talked to me anyway. I really liked the class, because I knew I would get better work. I looked around, and I knew it."

COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION AND EMPLOYMENT: A POSTSCRIPT

In the early 1990s, the City of Fort Worth offered a number of one-time "Model Blocks" grants to neighborhoods around the city. Although Fort Worth doesn't have many community development corporations, it nonetheless offered these grants in a way that neighborhood development groups elsewhere might envy: Community organizations could work with the city to set their own priorities for the money and to plan projects. Eligible uses prominently included housing, but the program also left room for other activities. The city would then fund or carry out the work in cooperation with the neighborhood group.

Following a 20-year pattern in community development nationwide, the majority of Model Block neighborhoods earmarked most or all of the money for new or renovated housing and other infrastructure improvements. "Some of them had some regrets or doubts later," recalls Abby Gamboa,

because it was only a one-time grant, and it wasn't all that much money. So they ended up with a few houses, which probably improved the neighborhood, but then that was it. We did something different. We allocated some of that money [nearly 20 percent] for a computer lab. Long before we ever heard of the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative, we knew people here were going to need computer training. So now, instead of helping 15 or 20 families with their housing, we have a resource that can help hundreds of families improve their earnings.

The intriguing fact about this investment calculation is that it was not being made by an organization that saw itself as being in the employment business. At the time, the Partners' Council was working on school-based health care, in partnership with a clinic operated by the University of Texas at Arlington. But even in NNPC's longer-range plans, the goal for the neighborhood didn't concentrate on health or employment per se but on an integrated plan for strengthening the local economy. "We set out to be a neighborhood economic development organization," Gamboa says, "and that's still how we see ourselves."

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Since community development organizations started appearing in the late 1960s, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest, their first emphasis has most often been on housing development and, beyond that, on improving commercial and industrial real estate. In the older industrial cities of those regions, housing abandonment and commercial disinvestment was epidemic. Real estate in many inner-city neighborhoods was in such dismal repair that no other redevelopment effort was possible until the houses, apartment buildings, and storefronts were repaired and reoccupied. That is the capsulized history of four decades of community development, and in hundreds of places it has been a highly successful history.

But in recent years, as community revitalization programs have taken root in newer or less densely planned cities of the South and West, many organizations have reckoned their needs and opportunities differently. Like NNPC, many have found that their housing stock was not, in fact, their most critical problem. As in the Near Northside, many neighborhoods had high rates of homeownership, even though families lacked the capital to maintain or improve properties beyond the essentials. Facing those circumstances, more and more community developers and community-building coalitions are taking the course that NNPC chose: Invest in the residents, and they will invest in the property.

Obvious as that choice may seem, it proved controversial at first, at least in some places. Some expert observers in both the development and the employment fields felt that neighborhood groups were a poor vehicle for workforce programs. Most people's jobs, after all, aren't located in the neighborhoods where they live but are spread across whole metropolitan areas. And in any case, as this report argued earlier, employment and training have traditionally been seen as a private matter, whereas community development and community-building are aimed at enlisting residents in inherently *public* tasks.

It is not entirely coincidental that the founders of the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative were growing suspicious of these assumptions at the same moment as Abby Gamboa and NNPC. In the late 1990s, community development organizations around the country — including those in the old, industrial cities with decades of real estate projects on their résumés — were looking more and more intently at training and employment as a crucial part of neighborhood revitalization. Many community social service organizations were meanwhile coming to a similar conclusion. Federal welfare reform in the mid-1990s had something to do with that. So did the economic rebound of many cities in the latter part of the

decade — a time when the number of available jobs in central cities was finally increasing, after years of decline.

But a subtler and maybe more fundamental shift has been the one that is now embodied in the working hypothesis of the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative: In very poor and culturally isolated communities, employment is not such a private matter after all. Seminal academic treatments of the subject — most famously, William Julius Wilson's 1996 book *When Work Disappears* — have made this case with increasing conviction. The physical environment, if grim enough, may still be the first target for redevelopment in the most abandoned and run-down areas. But elsewhere — and eventually, even in the most physically blighted places — the goals of building incomes, skills, and an atmosphere of opportunity are crucial to any program that includes more than, in Gamboa's phrase, "a few houses."

As NNPC's experience has proved, the cost of getting started in an effective workforce program may actually be a good deal lower than that for a serious housing and real estate strategy. Reaching 20 families with new or renovated housing can cost $2 million or more. As NNPC has shown, with an $80,000 grant from the local workforce board, it's possible to open up whole careers for 120 families. Both strategies are important, and in most neighborhoods both need to be addressed. But it's clear which one can go further on fewer dollars.

Still, employment and training programs have long-term costs that aren't obvious at first, and some of those costs still lurk in the shadows at NNPC. The most obvious example is space: As the organization has pursued its saturation plan for the Near Northside, the need to accommodate classes, orientation sessions, tutorials, practice facilities, and child care playrooms has mushroomed. Although Primera Iglesia Bautista's school building is ideally designed and available at relatively low rent per square foot, the rent goes up as NNPC uses more and more rooms in the building. So does the cost of renovations: The unused rooms, at this point, are the ones that need the most fixing up.

The costs could rise even more steeply if NNPC were to attempt to create more capital-intensive training programs like auto mechanics classes or construction and warehouse simulations. Because of their cost, such programs demand big enrollments (or higher tuitions, or both). Building a class size that's cost-effective could force NNPC to recruit trainees far beyond the boundaries of its neighborhood — an effort that would both tax its lean staff and dilute its focus on one community. That is a trade-off that many community-based employment programs face,

and there is no easy resolution for it. For now, Gamboa and Lozano have concentrated on helping Near Northside residents find training opportunities elsewhere if needed. But a "saturation" effort would plainly be easier if more of these opportunities were located in the neighborhood.

So the point is certainly not that workforce development is "easier" than more traditional forms of community service and development. It may be less expensive in some ways, though not in others. The point is that it is both possible and increasingly necessary for community groups to take a role in training and employment if they want to complete the equation by which neighborhoods are rebuilt and reinvigorated. That equation begins with "pump-priming" subsidies from government and elsewhere, but it is ultimately sustained by individual investment, growing incomes, and a culture of opportunity that spreads more and more widely across the community.

For NNPC, early in its second year with the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative, the signs that this approach is possible are encouraging but hardly conclusive. As of mid-2001, the program had served perhaps 200 people, roughly 2 percent of the neighborhood's adult population. "Saturation" still lies some distance off. Yet the challenge of these early years is not one of size alone but also one of quality — of "getting the mix right," as David Lozano puts it. The APEX experience, among several others, suggests that the formula is close to right. If so, the challenge of the next several years will be to enlarge it considerably and sustain it long enough to create not just a higher rate of employment but also an ongoing local structure that raises the sights, and the practical possibilities, of a whole community.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS ON MDRC PROJECTS

Reforming Welfare and Making Work Pay

Next Generation Project

A collaboration among researchers at MDRC and several other leading research institutions focused on studying the effects of welfare, antipoverty, and employment policies on children and families.

How Welfare and Work Policies Affect Children: A Synthesis of Research. 2001. Pamela Morris, Aletha Huston, Greg Duncan, Danielle Crosby, Johannes Bos.

How Welfare and Work Policies Affect Employment and Income: A Synthesis of Research. 2001. Dan Bloom, Charles Michalopoulos.

ReWORKing Welfare: Technical Assistance for States and Localities

A multifaceted effort to assist states and localities in designing and implementing their welfare reform programs. The project includes a series of "how-to" guides, conferences, briefings, and customized, in-depth technical assistance.

After AFDC: Welfare-to-Work Choices and Challenges for States. 1997. Dan Bloom.

Work First: How to Implement an Employment-Focused Approach to Welfare Reform. 1997. Amy Brown.

Business Partnerships: How to Involve Employers in Welfare Reform. 1998. Amy Brown, Maria Buck, Erik Skinner.

Promoting Participation: How to Increase Involvement in Welfare-to-Work Activities. 1999. Gayle Hamilton, Susan Scrivener.

Encouraging Work, Reducing Poverty: The Impact of Work Incentive Programs. 2000. Gordon Berlin.

Steady Work and Better Jobs: How to Help Low-Income Parents Sustain Employment and Advance in the Workforce. 2000. Julie Strawn, Karin Martinson.

Beyond Work First: How to Help Hard-to-Employ Individuals Get Jobs and Succeed in the Workforce. 2001. Amy Brown.

Project on Devolution and Urban Change

A multi-year study in four major urban counties — Cuyahoga County, Ohio (which includes the city of Cleveland), Los Angeles, Miami-Dade, and Philadelphia — that examines how welfare reforms are being implemented and affect poor people, their neighborhoods, and the institutions that serve them.

Big Cities and Welfare Reform: Early Implementation and Ethnographic Findings from the Project on Devolution and Urban Change. 1999. Janet Quint, Kathryn Edin, Maria Buck, Barbara Fink, Yolanda Padilla, Olis Simmons-Hewitt, Mary Valmont.

NOTE: For works not published by MDRC, the publisher's name is shown in parentheses. With a few exceptions, this list includes reports published by MDRC since 1999. A complete publications list is available from MDRC and on its Web site (www.mdrc.org), from which copies of MDRC's publications can also be downloaded.

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Food Security and Hunger in Poor, Mother-Headed Families in Four U.S. Cities. 2000. Denise Polit, Andrew London, John Martinez.

Assessing the Impact of Welfare Reform on Urban Communities: The Urban Change Project and Methodological Considerations. 2000. Charles Michalopoulos, Johannes Bos, Robert Lalonde, Nandita Verma.

Post-TANF Food Stamp and Medicaid Benefits: Factors That Aid or Impede Their Receipt. 2001. Janet Quint, Rebecca Widom.

Social Service Organizations and Welfare Reform. 2001. Barbara Fink, Rebecca Widom.

Monitoring Outcomes for Cuyahoga County's Welfare Leavers: How Are They Faring? 2001. Nandita Verma, Claudia Coulton.

The Health of Poor Urban Women: Findings from the Project on Devolution and Urban Change. 2001. Denise Polit, Andrew London, John Martinez.

Is Work Enough? The Experiences of Current and Former Welfare Mothers Who Work. 2001. Denise Polit, Rebecca Widom, Kathryn Edin, Stan Bowie, Andrew London, Ellen Scott, Abel Valenzuela.

Readying Welfare Recipients for Work: Lessons from Four Big Cities as They Implement Welfare Reform. 2002. Thomas Brock, Laura Nelson, Megan Reiter.

Wisconsin Works

This study examines how Wisconsin's welfare-to-work program, one of the first to end welfare as an entitlement, is administered in Milwaukee.

Complaint Resolution in the Context of Welfare Reform: How W-2 Settles Disputes. 2001. Suzanne Lynn.

Exceptions to the Rule: The Implementation of 24-Month Time-Limit Extensions in W-2. 2001. Susan Gooden, Fred Doolittle.

Matching Applicants with Services: Initial Assessments in the Milwaukee County W-2 Program. 2001. Susan Gooden, Fred Doolittle, Ben Glispie.

Time Limits

Florida's Family Transition Program

An evaluation of Florida's initial time-limited welfare program, which includes services, requirements, and financial work incentives intended to reduce long-term welfare receipt and help welfare recipients find and keep jobs.

The Family Transition Program: Implementation and Three-Year Impacts of Florida's Initial Time-Limited Welfare Program. 1999. Dan Bloom, Mary Farrell, James Kemple, Nandita Verma.

The Family Transition Program: Final Report on Florida's Initial Time-Limited Welfare Program. 2000. Dan Bloom, James Kemple, Pamela Morris, Susan Scrivener, Nandita Verma, Richard Hendra.

Cross-State Study of Time-Limited Welfare

An examination of the implementation of some of the first state-initiated time-limited welfare programs.

Welfare Time Limits: An Interim Report Card. 1999. Dan Bloom.

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Connecticut's Jobs First Program

An evaluation of Connecticut's statewide time-limited welfare program, which includes financial work incentives and requirements to participate in employment-related services aimed at rapid job placement. This study provides some of the earliest information on the effects of time limits in major urban areas.

Connecticut Post-Time Limit Tracking Study: Six-Month Survey Results. 1999. Jo Anna Hunter-Manns, Dan Bloom.

Jobs First: Implementation and Early Impacts of Connecticut's Welfare Reform Initiative. 2000. Dan Bloom, Laura Melton, Charles Michalopoulos, Susan Scrivener, Johanna Walter.

Connecticut's Jobs First Program: An Analysis of Welfare Leavers. 2000. Laura Melton, Dan Bloom.

Final Report on Connecticut's Welfare Reform Initiative. 2002. Dan Bloom, Susan Scrivener, Charles Michalopoulos, Pamela Morris, Richard Hendra, Diana Adams-Ciardullo, Johanna Walter.

Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project

An evaluation of Vermont's statewide welfare reform program, which includes a work requirement after a certain period of welfare receipt, and financial work incentives.

Forty-Two Month Impacts of Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project. 1999. Richard Hendra, Charles Michalopoulos.

WRP: Key Findings from the Forty-Two-Month Client Survey. 2000. Dan Bloom, Richard Hendra, Charles Michalopoulos.

Financial Incentives

Encouraging Work, Reducing Poverty: The Impact of Work Incentive Programs. 2000. Gordon Berlin.

Minnesota Family Investment Program

An evaluation of Minnesota's pilot welfare reform initiative, which aims to encourage work, alleviate poverty, and reduce welfare dependence.

Reforming Welfare and Rewarding Work: Final Report on the Minnesota Family Investment Program. 2000:

Volume 1: Effects on Adults. Cynthia Miller, Virginia Knox, Lisa Gennetian, Martey Dodoo, Jo Anna Hunter, Cindy Redcross.

Volume 2: Effects on Children. Lisa Gennetian, Cynthia Miller.

Reforming Welfare and Rewarding Work: A Summary of the Final Report on the Minnesota Family Investment Program. 2000. Virginia Knox, Cynthia Miller, Lisa Gennetian.

Final Report on the Implementation and Impacts of the Minnesota Family Investment Program in Ramsey County. 2000. Patricia Auspos, Cynthia Miller, Jo Anna Hunter.

New Hope Project

A test of a community-based, work-focused antipoverty program and welfare alternative operating in Milwaukee.

New Hope for People with Low Incomes: Two-Year Results of a Program to Reduce Poverty and Reform Welfare. 1999. Johannes Bos, Aletha Huston, Robert Granger, Greg Duncan, Thomas Brock, Vonnie McLoyd.

Canada's Self-Sufficiency Project

A test of the effectiveness of a temporary earnings supplement on the employment and welfare receipt of public assistance recipients. Reports on the Self-Sufficiency Project are available from: Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), 275 Slater St., Suite 900, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5H9, Canada. Tel.: 613-237-4311; Fax: 613-237-5045. In the United States, the reports are also available from MDRC.

Does SSP Plus Increase Employment? The Effect of Adding Services to the Self-Sufficiency Project's Financial Incentives (SRDC). 1999. Gail Quets, Philip Robins, Elsie Pan, Charles Michalopoulos, David Card.

When Financial Work Incentives Pay for Themselves: Early Findings from the Self-Sufficiency Project's Applicant Study (SRDC). 1999. Charles Michalopoulos, Philip Robins, David Card.

The Self-Sufficiency Project at 36 Months: Effects of a Financial Work Incentive on Employment and Income (SRDC). 2000. Charles Michalopoulos, David Card, Lisa Gennetian, Kristen Harknett, Philip K. Robins.

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SSP Plus at 36 Months: Effects of Adding Employment Services to Financial Work Incentives (SRDC). 2001. Ying Lei, Charles Michalopoulos.

Mandatory Welfare Employment Programs

National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies

Conceived and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), with support from the U.S. Department of Education (ED), this is the largest-scale evaluation ever conducted of different strategies for moving people from welfare to employment.

Do Mandatory Welfare-to-Work Programs Affect the Well-Being of Children? A Synthesis of Child Research Conducted as Part of the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (HHS/ED). 2000. Gayle Hamilton.

Evaluating Alternative Welfare-to-Work Approaches: Two-Year Impacts for Eleven Programs (HHS/ED). 2000. Stephen Freedman, Daniel Friedlander, Gayle Hamilton, JoAnn Rock, Marisa Mitchell, Jodi Nudelman, Amanda Schweder, Laura Storto.

Impacts on Young Children and Their Families Two Years After Enrollment: Findings from the Child Outcomes Study (HHS/ED). 2000. Sharon McGroder, Martha Zaslow, Kristin Moore, Suzanne LeMenestrel.

What Works Best for Whom: Impacts of 20 Welfare-to-Work Programs by Subgroup (HHS/ED). 2000. Charles Michalopoulos, Christine Schwartz.

Evaluating Two Approaches to Case Management: Implementation, Participation Patterns, Costs, and Three-Year Impacts of the Columbus Welfare-to-Work Program (HHS/ED). 2001. Susan Scrivener, Johanna Walter.

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How Effective Are Different Welfare-to-Work Approaches? Five-Year Adult and Child Impacts for Eleven Programs– Executive Summary (HHS/ED). 2001. Gayle Hamilton, Stephen Freedman, Lisa Gennetian, Charles Michalopoulos, Johanna Walter, Diana Adams-Ciardullo, Anna Gassman-Pines, Sharon McGroder, Martha Zaslow, Surjeet Ahluwalia, Jennifer Brooks.

Los Angeles's Jobs-First GAIN Program

An evaluation of Los Angeles's refocused GAIN (welfare-to-work) program, which emphasizes rapid employment. This is the first in-depth study of a full-scale "work first" program in one of the nation's largest urban areas.

The Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Evaluation: First-Year Findings on Participation Patterns and Impacts. 1999. Stephen Freedman, Marisa Mitchell, David Navarro.

The Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Evaluation: Final Report on a Work First Program in a Major Urban Center. 2000. Stephen Freedman, Jean Knab, Lisa Gennetian, David Navarro.

Teen Parents on Welfare

Teenage Parent Programs: A Synthesis of the Long-Term Effects of the New Chance Demonstration, Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, and the Teenage Parent Demonstration (TPD). 1998. Robert Granger, Rachel Cytron.

Ohio's LEAP Program

An evaluation of Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, which uses financial incentives to encourage teenage parents on welfare to stay in or return to school.

LEAP: Final Report on Ohio's Welfare Initiative to Improve School Attendance Among Teenage Parents. 1997. Johannes Bos, Veronica Fellerath.

New Chance Demonstration

A test of a comprehensive program of services that seeks to improve the economic status and general well-being of a group of highly disadvantaged young women and their children.

New Chance: Final Report on a Comprehensive Program for Young Mothers in Poverty and Their Children. 1997. Janet Quint, Johannes Bos, Denise Polit.

Parenting Behavior in a Sample of Young Mothers in Poverty: Results of the New Chance Observational Study. 1998. Martha Zaslow, Carolyn Eldred, editors.

Focusing on Fathers

Parents' Fair Share Demonstration

A demonstration for unemployed noncustodial parents (usually fathers) of children on welfare. PFS aims to improve the men's employment and earnings, reduce child poverty by increasing child support payments, and assist the fathers in playing a broader constructive role in their children's lives.

Fathers' Fair Share: Helping Poor Men Manage Child Support and Fatherhood (Russell Sage Foundation). 1999. Earl Johnson, Ann Levine, Fred Doolittle.

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Parenting and Providing: The Impact of Parents' Fair Share on Paternal Involvement. 2000. Virginia Knox, Cindy Redcross.

Working and Earning: The Impact of Parents' Fair Share on Low-Income Fathers' Employment. 2000. John M. Martinez, Cynthia Miller.

The Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum. 2000. Eileen Hayes, with Kay Sherwood.

The Challenge of Helping Low-Income Fathers Support Their Children: Final Lessons from Parents' Fair Share. 2001. Cynthia Miller, Virginia Knox

Career Advancement and Wage Progression

Opening Doors to Earning Credentials

An exploration of strategies for increasing low-wage workers' access to and completion of community college programs.

Opening Doors: Expanding Educational Opportunities for Low-Income Workers. 2001. Susan Golonka, Lisa Matus-Grossman.

Education Reform

Accelerated Schools

This study examines the implementation and impacts on achievement of the Accelerated Schools model, a whole-school reform targeted at at-risk students.

Evaluating the Accelerated Schools Approach: A Look at Early Implementation and Impacts on Student Achievement in Eight Elementary Schools. 2001. Howard Bloom, Sandra Ham, Laura Melton, Julienne O'Brien.

Career Academies

The largest and most comprehensive evaluation of a school-to-work initiative, this study examines a promising approach to high school restructuring and the school-to-work transition.

Career Academies: Building Career Awareness and Work-Based Learning Activities Through Employer Partnerships. 1999. James Kemple, Susan Poglinco, Jason Snipes.

Career Academies: Impacts on Students' Engagement and Performance in High School. 2000. James Kemple, Jason Snipes.

Career Academies: Impacts on Students' Initial Transitions to Post-Secondary Education and Employment. 2001. James Kemple.

Project GRAD

This evaluation examines Project GRAD, an education initiative targeted at urban schools and combining a number of proven or promising reforms.

Building the Foundation for Improved Student Performance: The Pre-Curricular Phase of Project GRAD Newark. 2000. Sandra Ham, Fred Doolittle, Glee Ivory Holton.

LILAA Initiative

This study of the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative explores the efforts of five adult literacy programs in public libraries to improve learner persistence.

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So I Made Up My Mind: Introducing a Study of Adult Learner Persistence in Library Literacy Programs. 2000. John T. Comings, Sondra Cuban.

"I Did It for Myself": Studying Efforts to Increase Adult Learner Persistence in Library Literacy Programs. 2001. John Comings, Sondra Cuban, Johannes Bos, Catherine Taylor.

Toyota Families in Schools

A discussion of the factors that determine whether an impact analysis of a social program is feasible and warranted, using an evaluation of a new family literacy initiative as a case study.

An Evaluability Assessment of the Toyota Families in Schools Program. 2001. Janet Quint.

Project Transition

A demonstration program that tested a combination of school-based strategies to facilitate students' transition from middle school to high school.

Project Transition: Testing an Intervention to Help High School Freshmen Succeed. 1999. Janet Quint, Cynthia Miller, Jennifer Pastor, Rachel Cytron.

Equity 2000

Equity 2000 is a nationwide initiative sponsored by the College Board to improve low-income students' access to college. The MDRC paper examines the implementation of Equity 2000 in Milwaukee Public Schools.

Getting to the Right Algebra: The Equity 2000 Initiative in Milwaukee Public Schools. 1999. Sandra Ham, Erica Walker.

School-to-Work Project

A study of innovative programs that help students make the transition from school to work or careers.

Home-Grown Lessons: Innovative Programs Linking School and Work (Jossey-Bass Publishers). 1995. Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp, Joshua Haimson.

Home-Grown Progress: The Evolution of Innovative School-to-Work Programs. 1997. Rachel Pedraza, Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp.

Employment and Community Initiatives

Jobs-Plus Initiative

A multi-site effort to greatly increase employment among public housing residents.

Mobilizing Public Housing Communities for Work: Origins and Early Accomplishments of the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 1999. James Riccio.

Building a Convincing Test of a Public Housing Employment Program Using Non-Experimental Methods: Planning for the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 1999. Howard Bloom.

Jobs-Plus Site-by-Site: An Early Look at Program Implementation. 2000. Edited by Susan Philipson Bloom with Susan Blank.

Building New Partnerships for Employment: Collaboration Among Agencies and Public Housing Residents in the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 2001. Linda Kato, James Riccio.

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Neighborhood Jobs Initiative

An initiative to increase employment in a number of low-income communities.

The Neighborhood Jobs Initiative: An Early Report on the Vision and Challenges of Bringing an Employment Focus to a Community-Building Initiative. 2001. Frieda Molina, Laura Nelson.

Connections to Work Project

A study of local efforts to increase competition in the choice of providers of employment services for welfare recipients and other low-income populations. The project also provides assistance to cutting-edge local initiatives aimed at helping such people access and secure jobs.

Designing and Administering a Wage-Paying Community Service Employment Program Under TANF: Some Considerations and Choices. 1999. Kay Sherwood.

San Francisco Works: Toward an Employer-Led Approach to Welfare Reform and Workforce Development. 2000. Steven Bliss.

Canada's Earnings Supplement Project

A test of an innovative financial incentive intended to expedite the reemployment of displaced workers and encourage full-year work by seasonal or part-year workers, thereby also reducing receipt of Unemployment Insurance.

Testing a Re-employment Incentive for Displaced Workers: The Earnings Supplement Project. 1999. Howard Bloom, Saul Schwartz, Susanna Lui-Gurr, Suk-Won Lee.

MDRC Working Papers on Research Methodology

A new series of papers that explore alternative methods of examining the implementation and impacts of programs and policies.

Building a Convincing Test of a Public Housing Employment Program Using Non-Experimental Methods: Planning for the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 1999. Howard Bloom.

Estimating Program Impacts on Student Achievement Using "Short" Interrupted Time Series. 1999. Howard Bloom.

Using Cluster Random Assignment to Measure Program Impacts: Statistical Implications for the Evaluation of Education Programs. 1999. Howard Bloom, Johannes Bos, Suk-Won Lee.

Measuring the Impacts of Whole School Reforms: Methodological Lessons from an Evaluation of Accelerated Schools. 2001. Howard Bloom.

The Politics of Random Assignment: Implementing Studies and Impacting Policy. 2000. Judith Gueron.

Modeling the Performance of Welfare-to-Work Programs: The Effects of Program Management and Services, Economic Environment, and Client Characteristics. 2001. Howard Bloom, Carolyn Hill, James Riccio.

A Regression-Based Strategy for Defining Subgroups in a Social Experiment. 2001. James Kemple, Jason Snipes.

Extending the Reach of Randomized Social Experiments: New Directions in Evaluations of American Welfare-to-Work and Employment Initiatives. 2001. James Riccio, Howard Bloom.

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The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization. We are dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through our research and the active communication of our findings, we seek to enhance the effectiveness of social policies and programs. MDRC was founded in 1974 and is located in New York City and Oakland, California.

MDRC's current projects focus on welfare and economic security, education, and employment and community initiatives. Complementing our evaluations of a wide range of welfare reforms are new studies of supports for the working poor and emerging analyses of how programs affect children's development and their families' well-being. In the field of education, we are testing reforms aimed at improving the performance of public schools, especially in urban areas. Finally, our community projects are using innovative approaches to increase employment in low-income neighborhoods.

Our projects are a mix of demonstrations — field tests of promising program models — and evaluations of government and community initiatives, and we employ a wide range of methods to determine a program's effects, including large-scale studies, surveys, case studies, and ethnographies of individuals and families. We share the findings and lessons from our work — including best practices for program operators — with a broad audience within the policy and practitioner community, as well as the general public and the media.

Over the past quarter century, MDRC has worked in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada. We conduct our projects in partnership with state and local governments, the federal government, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.

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